1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

163 average age of the mother at first conception can be estimated to be about sixteen, the range being reported from thirteen to nineteen. The father is generally about five years older than the mother. Considering the existing families with more than one child, we found that families had from two to six living and one or two deceased children. It must be realized, however, that these are not yet completed families and will produce further children. No difference in fertility could be noticed between women married to white men or Indians.

● 164 The Kaska are not a healthy people. The most common illnesses noted during the period of field work were tuberculosis, poor teeth, influenza, dysentery, colds, skin diseases, such as impetigo, and red eyes. A few cases of gonorrhea were treated by the army physicians. No undue frequency of accidents was noted. The only serious one during the fall of 1945 in the Upper Laird tribe was the case of an elderly man who fell while intoxicated and sprained his back.

Children tend to have particularly bad teeth. Two children, aged three, had lost the two upper middle incisors and several children showed extremely bad tooth decay. Influenza epidemics occur occasionally and in the fall of 1944 a dysentery epidemic spread from the town of Lower Post up and down the Liard River. At Smith River five Nelson Indian children were reported to have lost their lives from this disease and an upper Liard Indian woman and child also died. Sporadic outbreaks of dysentery continued during the

165 the summer of 1945. Eleven deaths occurred in the period from September 1944 through August 1945. This indicates a death rate of at least 55 per 1000, equalling the birth rate. Of these deaths seven were of children, one a newborn baby.

HISTORY

173 According to the Old Man, an Upper Liard informant, the Kaska Indians of that region believe themselves to be descendants from the Tlingit through the Ross River (Pelly) Indians. The progenitors of the present day Liard River Kaska originally moved south to explore the Upper Liard country and remained there. It seems worthwhile to consider this bit of traditional history. Pelly and Ross Rivers mark the headwaters of the great Yukon drainage system and their confluence represents a point which would be relatively easy to reach by moving up the waterways from Bering Sea. From the head of the Pelly River, migrants could continue toward the interior by crossing the Pelly River-Frances Lake divide, thus striking the Liard River drainage system. Once across this barrier the vast stretch of intermontane basin lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Cordillera would lie open. If such a theory of migration into the intermontane basin is to be sustained, the cultures of the tribes extending from the Yukon River would have to show a reasonable

[171] degree of similarity. Although evidence is still lacking for the groups north of Frances Lake (for example, the Pelly River Indians), similarity is found between the Kaska (but excluding the Nelson River tribe), Tahltan, and Carrier. Masks, potlatching, line dancing instead of circle dancing, and dual organizations are some of the traits common to Alaskan and the Athapaskan tribes of west-central British Columbia but lacking among the more easterly Slave and Sekani groups.

The above migration theory would deny the derivation of the diagnostic traits from the Northwest Coast, although the subsequent development of such traits may have been

1: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1949 ND12 Nahane ND12

by her daughter, Lady Suza, and a foster son, Nitla. With Lady Suza most of the time was her youngest son, Donald. From these relatives Metša received a minimum of care and little compassion. Frequently her fire was permitted to go out and rekindled only after her prolonged moaning and shrieking brought attention. Nitla complained several times of being unable to sleep at night or of being awakened by Old Metša's demands for fire. Old Man too complained of being kept awake by the sick woman's moaning. Because of her lice and uncleanliness, all except Metša's daughter were reluctant to come into contact with the old woman, although on the boat journey to Old Man's place illness and debility made it practically impossible for her to climb into the vessel unassisted. On the boat she sat isolated from the other travelers and most of the time crouched in the prow near the dogs. Early in October everyone in camp left on a hunting trip and abandoned the old woman in camp with only the ethnographer's family. According to Nitla, they went on the hunt only after feeling sure that Old Metša's health was improved, and that she was able to do small things for herself. Four or five days' supply of wood was left, but little food other than sugar, oatmeal, and flour. During this period the old woman once more relapsed into serious illness (perhaps because of too liberally helping herself to sugar, for which she had an inordinate fondness) and was unable to keep her fire going. The wood also became exhausted. Among the last people to return from the hunt was Metša's daughter.

Youth shows little sympathy with the debilities and weaknesses of old age. No courtesies are developed toward the old. So long as a camp contains food, however, a helpless old person will not be allowed to starve. The aged are also entitled to rations provided by the Indian Affairs Branch. Unless there are particularly devoted children, however, it is likely that the standard of living of the very old must go below that of the average member of the society.

Sickness[27]

Sickness is apt to strike at any point along the life cycle and its classification following old age is solely a matter of convention. Here we will deal with those aspects of illness which affect the person's interpersonal relations. The Kaska Indian, with rare reprieves, is forced to live in close association with illness, either his own or that of some member of his family. While all illness is not necessarily serious, concern with symptoms occupies a large portion of the adult's attention. Young people, in contrast, often underestimate the seriousness of sickness.

Little concern with the implications of sickness for the future is manifested, even by those men who are most concerned with their symptoms. Yet incapacitation through illness may have serious economic consequence. Illness in the fall, for example, can prevent hunting and frustrate the accumulation of meat for the winter. If serious ill health occurs in the winter it hinders trapping. The following spring, with insufficient fur, a man can do little more than pay off the credit extended to him the previous year before beginning to run up a new and higher debt. Several men were caught in this vicious circle.

The economic burden resulting from a man's sickness must, in greatest part, be borne

[27] Field work in connection with sickness was greatly aided by the use of Ackerknecht's *On the Collecting of Data Concerning Primitive Medicine* (1943). For other information concerning ideas of sickness and medicine in Kaska society see below pp. 245–246.